

**National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
Project Evaluation Form**

Project Name and Number: Right Whale Informational Signs for Mariners #2003-0170-012

Recipient: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Project Location: _____

- 1) Were the specific objectives as outlined in your application and grant agreement successfully implemented and accomplished? Explain.

The objectives for the conservation of right whales through public education as outlined in the application for North Atlantic Right Whale Informational signs for mariners project have been accomplished. The sign's message includes:

- a) Increasing awareness about the calving grounds for right whales in the southeastern United States
- b) Informing the boating public about pertinent laws and guidelines protecting right whales
- c) Informing mariners and the public about reporting entangled right whales

In addition to the message, hand delivery of the signs to targeted marina's and municipalities allowed for additional outreach opportunities via direct communication with facility owners and by distributing supplemental right whale conservation information.

- 2) Please assess project accomplishments as quantitatively as possible.

The FWC project completed the sign development and produced 200 North Atlantic right whale informational metal signs for placement at targeted Florida marine facilities and distribution to project cooperators in the coastal southeastern United States. Each cooperating agency is currently posting the number of units requested: Georgia Department of Natural Resources received 45 signs, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources received 25 signs and the University of North Carolina Wilmington received 12 signs. In Florida, signs have been installed at 21 municipal boat ramp facilities and were hand-delivered with sign placement consultation to 28 targeted marinas from Amelia Island down to the Miami area (see maps). We also provided a sign to the U.S. Navy for installation at their Mayport facility. We hope to include sign placement at eight additional locations in Florida pending permission. Remaining signs are for replacement purposes and for any new marine facilities that fit the selection criteria.

Informal meetings were conducted with marina owners and dock masters at the majority of targeted marina locations and municipal facilities. The meetings, basically to discuss sign placement, created excellent opportunities for additional dialog between facility owners, municipal managers and FWC right whale sign project investigators.

A presentation was given during the spring and fall Southeast North Atlantic Right Whale Implementation Team meetings outlining the objectives, message and placement of the sign project. In addition, images and information about the right whale signs were included in three other presentations given on large whale conservation. These included two talks given to University of Florida veterinarian students interested in marine animal health and one to an Elderhostel group interested in marine conservation issues.

Requested articles describing the project have been provided to two conservation newsletters. A downloadable PDF file was posted on our FWRI website (<http://research.myfwc.com>). The downloadable PDF file features the actual sign design with a description of the objectives. A press release is currently being reviewed and will be available for posting in the near future. As a result of a soft media release during the actual installation of the signs in Florida, an article appeared in Jacksonville Florida's widely read Times Union newspaper that included a brief description of the project, right whale regulations and a photograph of a sign being installed. A final press release is being planned to correspond with the beginning of the calving season in the southeast to generate additional interest in right whale conservation during the season. Press releases were also prepared for distribution in South Carolina and Georgia. Several articles have been printed.

3) Assess the number of people reached through your work (e.g., landowners, students, organizations, agencies) Did other land managers benefit from your project?

The right whale sign project has reached a wide audience with an excellent potential for increased exposure as posted facilities are utilized by targeted mariners in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina as well as the media release planned for the beginning of the calving season.

Many marina operators, municipal managers, a segment of the boating public, as well as interested students have been reached along the eastern seaboard during this project. The following quote from the town of Ponce Inlet's town planner to his town manager in reference to our sign posting request is an example of the interest generated during this project. "This looks like a good thing to get involved in – the right whale is one of the world's rarest mammals – it's on the endangered species list." Ponce Inlet is located adjacent to North Atlantic right whale's critical habitat. Support gained during the project such as this will assist future right whale conservation outreach efforts in the southeast. Marine managers and operators will benefit from proactively providing regulatory information such as the 500 yard no approach rule to their clients in addition to aiding in conservation efforts.

4) Were any surveys or interviews conducted with partners to help gauge the success of your efforts?

Several meetings were conducted with cooperators and interested parties (including FWC ISM, FWC FWRI, GDNR, and NOAA Fisheries) to discuss the sign's message. During discussions, we prioritized verbiage for the sign. The priority points agreed upon by the

participants that have been highlighted on the signs included guidance to boater's to steer clear of right whales, the 500 yard no-approach regulation, and contact information if an injured, entangled or dead right whale is sighted by a mariner. The sign message and placement strategy was also presented to the Southeast Right Whale Recovery Plan Implementation Team (SEIT) for their input.

5) How will the project be evaluated in terms of monitoring or assessment of cause-and-effect response? Describe the evaluation timescale (e.g., one year, five years, ten years). How will monitoring results be reported?

Incident forms used to document close approaches of vessels and whales are federally required through work agreements with partnering agencies within the southeastern region. Data collected from these incidents will be mapped along with the position locations of posted signs. In addition, the source of reports of entangled whales and carcasses in this region will be collected whenever possible. In this way we may be able to detect increases in reports from recreational and fishery related vessels operators.

6) Does this project fit into a larger program, spatially or temporally? If so, how has that program benefited from your work? (For example, an easement or on-the-ground work that connects or benefits other protected properties.)

This project compliments right whale conservation efforts in the southeast. Distribution of posters to coastal airports adjacent to the right whale critical habitat has been included in NOAA Fisheries scope of work since the 1990's. Important conservation messages found on these poster's is reinforced via the right whale mariner signs. In addition, multiple instances of "close calls" were observed in the Southeast during the last calving season. In response to these occurrences and in an attempt to curtail vessel/whale interactions, NOAA Fisheries provided right whale regulation guidelines to the boating public through media releases. The North Atlantic Right Whale Informational Sign for Mariners project compliments and reinforces these efforts by providing expanded coverage of important right whale conservation messages and regulation guidelines to mariners using right whale habitat.

7) Does the project incorporate an adaptive management component? If so, please explain. Any lessons learned that will guide future implementation of this, or similar projects?

It is important to consider the potential psychological impact of the sign's message on the target audience. We specifically used language such as "Help Protect North Atlantic Right Whales" which conveys a proactive, positive message versus a strict regulatory style. We received support of this communication approach from educators associated with the SEIT.

8) Was there a local/regional/national response? Any media/press involvement?

FWC issued a soft release to the media during the sign installations. An article appeared in Jacksonville's Florida Times Union which has a northeast Florida readership. The article included information about the 500 yard no-approach regulation, the populations' endangered status as well as a photograph of the sign.

9) To what degree has this project contributed to the conservation community as a whole?

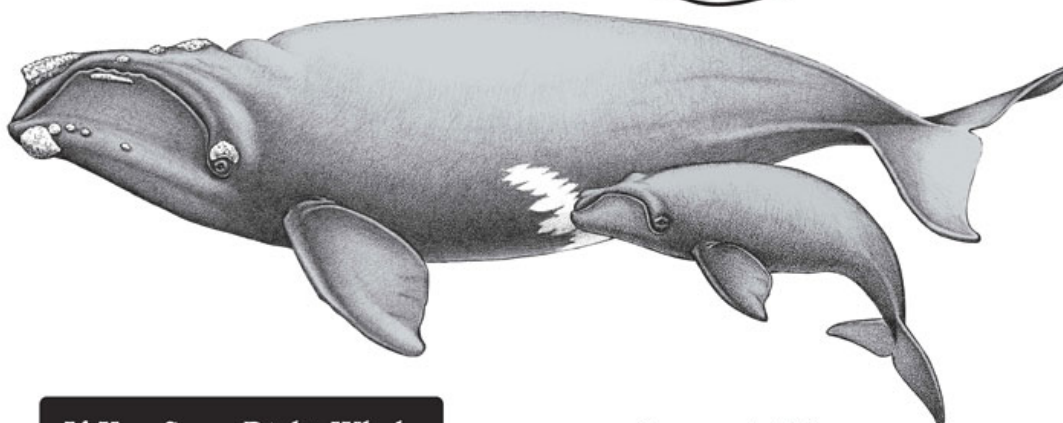
NOAA Fisheries has communicated to the SEIT that education and outreach efforts are an important tool to help the agency in recovery efforts. This project was presented to the SEIT and it received strong positive feedback from the participants.

10) Did your work bring in additional partners, more landowners, et cetera, who would be interested in doing similar work on their land in the future? If so, please describe.

This project has generated public interest in right whale conservation on various levels. For instance, several targeted marina operators suggested involving their marina associations in order to help get the message out (including interested marine facilities not currently reached by this effort). In addition, some marine education facilities showed an interest in providing North Atlantic right whale conservation information to their visitors, many of whom are boaters. This project grew in scope since its inception in that now signs are being installed at specific locations as far as North Carolina.

Help Protect North Atlantic Right Whales

Only about 300–350 North Atlantic right whales remain. They are one of the most endangered of all large whales. Right whales migrate between their feeding grounds in the northeastern United States and their only known calving area, which is off the southeastern United States. They are usually seen here between December and March.



If You See a Right Whale

- Operate vessel at slowest safe speed. Remain alert for other whales in the area.
- Stay at least 500 yards away from right whales. (50 CFR 224.103(c))
- If whales approach you, move slowly away.



SAVE A WHALE

Immediately report injured, dead or entangled right whales to the U.S. Coast Guard by VHF Ch 16.



North Atlantic Right Whale Identifying Characteristics Adult Length: 55 feet • Weight: 55 tons



Notched Tail



White Markings
on Head



V-shaped Blow



Blunt Shaped
Flippers



No Dorsal Fin

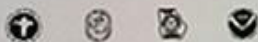
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